
5th March 2025

Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
RE: Senate Bill 702

Dear Senate Committee,

My name is Karni Jha. I am a proud Oregonian, a mother, and a small business owner with two local tobacco/vape shops in the outlying Portland area. My shops offer cigarettes, cigars, disposable vapes, vape juice, as well as other related products. I employ several very hard-working, responsible long-term employees who are an integral part of running my business, and who take great pride in ensuring compliance with Oregon's state laws regarding identification of each and every customer we serve. My employees depend on their jobs at my shops in order to support their families, just as I depend on my business to support my own family. It is for this reason that I am writing today in opposition of SB702.

If passed, SB702 would have a devastating effect on both of my local shops. Flavored nicotine and tobacco products account for an inordinately significant portion of sales at both shops (approximately 90% of sales at one store, and between 35% and 50% of sales at the other). Losing the ability to offer these products to my customers would mean the imminent closure of at least one of my stores, and the loss of jobs for the employees there. The loss of those sales at the other store would likely lead to a reduction in employees and/or the hours they work. This would have a detrimental effect on all of my employees, as well as myself and my family.

It is my opinion that the prohibition resulting from the passing of SB702 would be decidedly ineffective in the pursuit of preventing youth access to flavored tobacco products. These products would still be obtainable, just by much more dangerous means (on the street, black market, etc). Having these products available for sale in stores like mine is not the problem. The problem stems more from inadequate education for youth and their parents, as well as a lack of enforcement of state identification laws. There are a myriad of other options

for curbing youth access short of total prohibition. I will outline some of my ideas below.

1. Educational Programs for Youth and Parents

Implementing programs to educate youth and their parents on the dangers of underage consumption of tobacco and nicotine products is imperative. Parents need to be taught how to educate their children, how to help their children make smart decisions regarding abstinence from these products, and what signs to look for if their children are using these products. Children should be learning about these dangers both at home and at school. Educational programs at all age levels would help prepare children to deal with peer pressure and make healthy decisions for themselves.

2. Tax Implementation to Fund Public Education Programs

Instead of prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products, perhaps implementing a reasonable tax on them would be a fair way to keep these products available for purchase by adult customers, while providing funding for educational programs to reduce youth access and consumption.

3. Stronger Requirements for Identification and Enforcement

While the law states that stores should be checking identification when selling tobacco and nicotine products, this is not always happening at every store. Stores should be required to have a system that scans every customer's ID, preferable upon entering the store. These scanners alert to the presence of fake ID's and make it easy for store employees to ensure they are not selling to underage customers. Furthermore, there should be stronger enforcement of identification laws, with more frequent "stings" and stiffer penalties for those who fail to identify customers.

4. Restrict Sales to only 21+ Stores

Instead of banning flavored tobacco products altogether, I feel that a more viable and less devastating option would be to restrict the sale of these products to stores that only serve customers who are over the age of 21. The availability of these products at supermarkets and gas stations, where children readily frequent, is a contributing factor in the availability and access of these products by children.

There are many other options for regulation and availability restriction that should be considered before a total ban is put into place. Adults over the age of 21 should have the freedom to choose which products they purchase, and should be able to purchase their chosen products in Oregon in a legal manner.

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my opinions and ideas. I thank the committee for taking them into consideration, and I strongly urge the committee to vote no on Senate Bill 702.

Sincerely,

Karni Jha